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Perceived Support and Connectedness in Greek-letter Organizations During the COVID-19 Pandemic

by

Julia Bishop

A Thesis
Submitted to the Honors College of
The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment
of Honors Requirements

May 2021

Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this project is to assess whether or not students involved in the fraternity and sorority life community at The University of Southern Mississippi feel supported and connected in their respective chapters. To understand students' perspectives in this area, a survey was developed. The survey included questions pertaining to the experiences of Greek-letter organization members with the chapter environment, efforts of chapter leadership, and personal feelings of connectedness during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey was sent out to all 26 fraternity and sorority chapter presidents at The University of Southern Mississippi, including the College Panhellenic Council, National Pan-Hellenic Council, and Interfraternity Council. A total of 149 responses were returned, 118 of which were analysis-eligible responses with a duration of more than 240 seconds (4 minutes). Results indicated that organizational trust and organizational satisfaction are predictors of satisfaction in organizational COVID-19 response. This research contributes to the fraternity and sorority experience by providing insight into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the chapter's response to it as well as what variables are necessary for chapter satisfaction.

Keywords: Greek-letter organization, COVID-19, connectedness, support, survey

DEDICATION

I would like to thank my parents for their unwavering support and confidence in me throughout this thesis process and my entire college experience. I could not have done this without you. Thank you to each person I have been able to connect with through fraternity and sorority life. This experience has impacted me in more ways than I can express, and I am so grateful. I could not ask for a better community, or a better group of family and friends in my time at Southern Miss.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Katie Anthony, for her contribution to this project. She has shown me what it looks like to prioritize research and support those who are learning how to conduct it. I would also like to thank the Honors College for providing opportunities for assistance to thesis students. Without this support, this project and so many others would not be successful or impactful. To each student who responded to my survey, thank you for making this research possible and assisting me in this way.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

USM	The University of Southern Mississippi
GLO	Greek-letter Organization
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease (2019-nCoV)
CDC	Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

A number of researchers have demonstrated the impact of shared experiences and community within groups and organizations. In every aspect of society, there are multiple levels of community and areas where being a part of a functioning network is valued. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations and businesses have had to change the ways in which they operate and communicate. In order to better understand how support and connectedness in organizations can affect both individuals and groups, it is important to study how organizations have successfully or unsuccessfully supported their members during a pandemic that may limit communication and in-person interaction between members and groups as a whole. This gap in connectedness is apparent on college campuses and within organizations such as sororities and fraternities, whose purpose is to create connection between members.

The sudden change in organizations such as fraternities and sororities has been unlike other challenges they may have previously faced. This research is important because, as the COVID-19 pandemic is recent and its effects are still evolving, the drastic impact it has had on the fraternity and sorority life community has not been studied previously. This research will highlight the areas in which chapter leaders, both locally and nationally, have succeeded or fallen short in continuing to connect members despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic. Additionally, concepts like identification, support, and organizational trust will be examined in order to understand how they impact college students. This research could be used to better understand the attitudes of fraternity and sorority members at Southern Miss, as well as to provide perspective for how Greek-letter organizations across the nation are being affected by the COVID-19

pandemic. Understanding this will not only aid leadership currently, but also in the future as well. COVID-19 has changed the way many organizations operate, and this research could provide knowledge on how students are feeling and what may need to change and improve moving forward.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Fraternities and sororities have existed on college campuses for more than two centuries. Classified as Greek-letter organizations (GLO), there are more than 150 fraternities and sororities that serve as social organizations. These groups began as a way for individuals in college to form relationships and have activities outside of academics. Some groups were started as social organizations, while others were started as religious, academic, or cultural organizations. Over time, these have continued to evolve and change as membership increased. They developed beyond their original purpose and began to take shape as groups whose purpose surpassed only academic or only religious activities, for example. Women's sororities were first founded as a way to unite women students on campuses and establish themselves in a structure similar to the existing men's fraternities (Torbenson and Parks, 2009). They began to operate the same way and grew quickly in popularity after the first organizations were founded in the mid-1850s.

While a wealth of risks have been found to be associated with fraternities and sororities, these organizations provide community and form connection. Routon and Walker (2016) found that many Greek-letter organizations claim to "instill leadership skills in and offer a support network for members" and do in fact create these opportunities. Academics, social gatherings, and improved skillsets both during and after collegiate life are discussed. However, they do not include research on whether or not these students feel supported by chapter officers and organization leadership. A 1984 study found that affiliated students are more likely to be involved on campus and more invested in their organizations outside of fraternity and sorority life, partially because they are encouraged to do so. These organizations conduct events such as initiations,

social and networking events, and philanthropic events. Since the beginning of 2020, these have been greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the response of universities.

COVID-19 is a disease caused by “severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2)” (Dashraath, et al., 2020). It began rapidly spreading through the United States after the United States declared a public health emergency on February 3, 2020, and the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a Pandemic on March 11, 2020 (AJMC, 2021). COVID-19 has caused additional issues and illness in vulnerable populations. The groups of people at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 include the elderly, pregnant women, and those with underlying, preexisting conditions, such as cancer, lung diseases, and diabetes. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), COVID-19 spread can be slowed by several things. This includes wearing a mask that covers the nose and mouth, keeping a distance of at least 6 feet between yourself and others, washing your hands often, and avoided crowds and poorly ventilated areas.

As knowledge and fear of the pandemic and its implications grew, businesses, schools, organizations, and more were greatly affected. Nicola et al. discuss these effects and how they are seen throughout society within agriculture, education, finance, and other areas. It is important to recognize the seriousness of these implications in understanding how it affects college students, and more specifically, Greek-letter organization members, as institutions transitioned rapidly to online learning through web-based programs in place of in person instruction in accordance with the Center for Disease Control guidelines. Not only did this affect student learning, but student activities both on and off-campus (Lassoued et al., 2020).

Organizational identification is the concept that identifies the attachment individuals feel between their membership with their organization and their own self-concept once they become invested in the group (Parker and Haridakis). Organizational identification depends on a mutual relationship and communication by both the individual and the organization. Both of these things reflect the other and influence how meaning is assigned to the relationship. Organizational identification allows members to understand reactions and influence the organization, and according to Parker and Haridakis, it is an indication of positive attitudes and behaviors. Understanding the connection to the organization and the individual self-concept is important in recognizing the stability of the relationship, especially since there are often shared values between parties.

Eisenberger et al. discuss similar aspects in terms of organizational support, including the concept that the individual's perception of their support from the organization is based on multiple factors. This treatment of individuals by the group or organization they are a part of is what determines their understanding of the organization's intention as far as their members, and how willing they are to show up, participate, and put effort into the organization for the benefit of the group. They found that employees often alter their own behaviors in order to adhere to and act in compliance with their perceptions of the organization.

Tang et al. explore measurements of organizational culture. In this study, family philosophy was studied based on four main concepts, and the resulting scale was found to be reliable. Organizational culture varies based on open communication, family orientation

and loyalty, and more. According to this research, communication is largely responsible for this culture and the overall attitude towards the organization.

Rawlins explores the relationship between organizational transparency and employee trust (2008). Through this study, it was found that there is a strong relationship between trust and transparency. Not only does this improve employees' willingness to work and participate in organizational activities, but it also improves employee relationships in general (Rawlins, 2008). Organizations with members or employees that encourage and engage in active participation are often more open and honest about the state of the organization and what is going on within it. Allowing members to be informed, even about negative aspects of the organization, has been found to improve the overall experience and bring more individuals to trust in it. Additionally, employees who trust the organization are more committed, more likely to endorse the policies, and more likely to take risks for the overall benefit of the group (Guh et al., 2013).

Walker, Martin, and Hussey (2015) found that students in Greek-letter organizations place greater emphasis on-campus involvement and maintaining an active social life than students who are not affiliated. These students expect their collegiate experience to provide them with relationships and the ability and skillset to socialize with others, while students who are not involved in Greek-letter organizations do not expect this at the same level. In a study conducted by Pike in 2000, a significant difference was found between Greek and non-Greek students' level of involvement in social activities and the development of related skills and abilities. Students affiliated with Greek-letter organizations did not report lower levels of academic involvement than other students did. Membership in a Greek-letter organization was found to be directly related to the

student's social involvement and integration into their college experiences and environments (Pike, 2000). The study's findings suggest that membership in a fraternity or sorority does not have to have a negative effect on college students' cognitive development, even though membership is associated with higher levels of social involvement. Another study, conducted in 1995, found that "out-of-class" experiences such as membership in fraternities and sororities often lead to growth in other areas, such as organizational skills and relationships. These skills and attributes are associated with more success and satisfaction after college, according to the research (Kuh, 2000). When reflecting on their experiences as members of Greek-letter organizations, both men and women recognized their growth as leaders and in relational and leadership skills (Adams et al., 2000). Fraternities and sororities provide opportunities for networking as well as opportunities to experience new relationships and discover skills students may not have had the opportunity to develop prior to their membership in a Greek-letter organization.

The following hypotheses were formed based on the literature:

- *H1a: For every unit increase of perceived organizational culture, there will be a unit increase in perceived satisfaction with organizational COVID-19 response.*
- *H1b: For every unit increase of perceived organizational identification, there will be a unit increase in perceived satisfaction with organizational COVID-19 response.*
- *H1c: For every unit increase of perceived organizational support, there will be a unit increase in perceived satisfaction with organizational COVID-19 response.*

- *H1d: For every unit increase of perceived organizational trust, there will be a unit increase in perceived satisfaction with organizational COVID-19 response.*
- *H1e: For every unit increase of perceived organizational satisfaction, there will be a unit increase in perceived satisfaction with organizational COVID-19 response.*

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to assess the experiences of Greek-letter organization members and their perception of support from leaders and connectedness in their chapters during the COVID-19 pandemic. A survey was utilized to assess members' experiences.

Selection of Participants

Because this project is directly related to students in Greek-letter organizations, the survey was only available to active members of these organizations. The survey was made available to the three councils active at Southern Miss: the College Panhellenic Council, the National Pan-Hellenic Council, and the Interfraternity Council. Together, these councils support 26 organizations and over 1,000 students.

Survey Presentation

The survey was sent via email to each acting chapter president. The email contained explained the purpose of the survey and contained additional information about how to complete it, as well as possible incentives. The anonymous survey link was also included. The email can be found in Appendix D.

Participants

Before completing the survey, participants provided informed consent to participate. 118 responses were analyzed. 146 responses were received, and responses with a duration under 4 minutes, or 240 seconds, were disregarded due to an inability to accurately and honestly answer in that time. The researcher deemed these responses ineligible for analysis. Of the remaining 118 participants, 17 (14%) were freshman, 26 (21.5%) were sophomores, 33 (27.3%) were juniors, and 42 (34.7%) were seniors. Additionally, a majority of participants were women. Of the 118 participants, 27 (22.3%)

were male, while 91 (75.2%) were female. The participants represented varying lengths of membership in their Greek-letter organizations, from one-year memberships to four-year memberships. 19.8% of participants are in their first year of membership, 30.6% of participants are in their second year of membership, 24.0% of participants are in their third year of membership, and 23.1% of participants are in their fourth year of membership. Finally, a majority of the participants were white. 90.1% of the participants identified as white, while 4.1% identified as Black or African American, 0.8% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, 1.7% identified as Asian, and 0.8% identified as Pacific Islander.

Instruments

The following scales were modified to address the questions specific to Greek-letter organizations and their members at The University of Southern Mississippi regarding organizational culture, identification, support, satisfaction, trust, and perceived COVID-19 response. The cross-sectional survey consisted of 59 questions, not including demographic-based questions regarding classification, ethnicity, gender, and length of membership in a Greek-letter organization at USM. The survey questions can be found in Appendix C.

Organizational support. A nine-item modified version of Hutchison and Sowa's (1986) measure was used to measure organizational support. Participants were asked to respond to statements by acknowledging the level to which they agreed using a 5 item Likert-type scale. Statements included, "My Greek-letter organization fails to appreciate any extra efforts from me " and "My Greek-letter organization shows very little concern for me." Cronbach's alpha for the scale was 0.938 (M = 16.96; SD = 8.13).

Organizational culture. An eight-item modified version of Tang's (2000) organizational culture scale was implemented in the current study. Participants were asked to respond to the Likert-type items with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree; example questions included "I feel that my Greek-letter organization has a real interest in the welfare and overall satisfaction of its members" and "Chapter leadership gives me the freedom to express ideas." Cronbach's alpha for the scale was .902 (M =13.92; SD = 6.30.)

Organizational identification. A 14-item modified version of Parker and Haridakis' (2008) organizational identification scale was implemented in the current study. Example items included, "During the COVID-19 pandemic, chapter leadership has had a different idea about the organization than I have" and "If my Greek-letter organization failed, I'd feel like I failed." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.818 (M = 22.92; SD = 7.66).

Organizational satisfaction. A seven-item modified version of Hon and Grunig's (1999) organizational satisfaction was implemented into this study. Example items included, "My Greek-letter organization has failed to satisfy the needs of its members during the COVID-19 pandemic," as well as "Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship my Greek-letter organization has established with its members during the COVID-19 pandemic." For this scale, Cronbach's alpha was 0.867 (M = 15.55; SD = 6.40).

Organizational trust. A 15-item modified version of Rawlins's (2008) organizational trust measure was implemented in the current measured the relationship between trust and transparency and its impact on individuals and groups. Rawlins utilized

a Likert-type scale, so individuals were able to express to what extent they trust in their organization and feel like the organization prioritized trust and transparency for the benefit of its members. Statements incorporated into this study included "My Greek-letter organization wants to understand how its decisions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic affect its chapter members;" "involves members to help identify the information we need during the COVID-19 pandemic;" and "Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, my Greek-letter organization wants its members to know what it is doing and why it is doing it." Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.935 (M = 31.75; SD = 12.14).

Organizational COVID-19 response. A 6-item scale was employed to measure perceptions surrounding the response of the Greek-letter organization to the COVID-19 crisis. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.883 (M = 11.17; SD = 5.172). Participants were asked to respond to statements such as "In 2020, I felt as though my Greek-letter organization did a good job navigating the COVID-19 pandemic;" "In 2020, I felt as though my Greek-letter organization supported its members during the COVID-19 pandemic;" and "At the chapter level, my Greek-letter organization prioritized the well-being of its members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic."

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

H1a, H1b, H1c, H1d, and H1e predicted associations between satisfaction with organizational COVID-19 response and organizational culture, organizational identification, organizational support, organizational trust, and organizational satisfaction, respectively. In Table 1, Model 1 shows that the variables account for 72.1% of the variance. Table 2 shows an ANOVA test, which demonstrates that H1a, H1b, and H1c should be rejected or accepted as null. In Table 3, the results of a linear regression analysis run between the five variables and the dependent variable of organizational COVID-19 response can be seen. The use of regression in this study allows for a straightforward analysis of the variables as they are compared to one another and the satisfaction of the organizational COVID-19 response. When the variables were thrown together in one model, only 2 out of 5 were statistically significant. Organizational trust (b = .568, SE = .095) *and* organizational satisfaction (b = .297, SE = .084) were significant ($p < 0.05$), while organizational culture (b = .134, SE = .100), organizational identification (b = .109, SE = .098), and organizational support (b = - .101, SE = .101) were not ($p > 0.05$).

Table 1: Model Summary for Variance

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.858[a]	.735	.721	.43423	.735	52.800	5	95	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), ORGsatisfaction, Orgculture_full, ORGID, ORGtrust, ORGsupport

Table 2: ANOVA Test Determining Significance of Variables

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	49.779	5	9.956	52.800	.000[b]
	Residual	17.913	95	.189		
	Total	67.692	100			
a. Dependent Variable: ORGCOVIDresponse						
b. Predictors: (Constant), ORGsatisfaction, Orgculture_full, ORGID, ORGtrust, ORGsupport						

Table 3: Regression Model Predicting Perceptions of COVID-19 Response

Coefficients[a]						
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-.249	.154		-1.619	.109
	ORGsupport	-.101	.101	-.099	-1.008	.316
	ORGID	.109	.098	.086	1.115	.268
	Orgculture_full	.134	.100	.119	1.341	.183
	ORGtrust	.568	.095	.545	5.977	.000
	ORGsatisfaction	.279	.084	.305	3.304	.001
a. Dependent Variable: ORGCOVIDresponse						

The statistically significant variables, organizational trust and organizational satisfaction, were then entered into a block linear regression model, as can be seen in Table 4. Again, these items were statistically significant (.000 sig. f change) and accounted for 74.1% (.741 adjusted R square) of satisfaction with organizational COVID-19 response in Greek-letter organizations. Therefore, H1d and H1e were supported, but H1a, H1b, and H1c were rejected. This can also be seen in the (Table 5) ANOVA test as the significance of organizational trust and satisfaction are found to be .000 in both

Model 1 and Model 2. Table 6 reports the unstandardized beta and standard error for these variables, in which Model 1 reports organizational trust (*b* = .877, *SE* = .058), and Model 2 reports organizational trust (*b* = .602, *SE* = .074) and organizational satisfaction (*b* = .344, *SE* = .065).

Table 4: Variance Results for Organizational Trust and Organizational Trust and Organizational Satisfaction

Model Summary									
					Change Statistics				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.823[a]	.678	.675	.49140	.678	225.332	1	107	.000
2	.863[b]	.745	.741	.43908	.067	28.021	1	106	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), ORGtrust									
b. Predictors: (Constant), ORGtrust, ORGsatisfaction									

Table 5: ANOVA Test for Significance of Organizational Trust and Organizational Trust and Organizational Satisfaction

ANOVA[a]						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	54.413	1	54.413	225.332	.000[b]
	Residual	25.838	107	.241		
	Total	80.251	108			
2	Regression	59.815	2	29.907	155.128	.000[c]
	Residual	20.436	106	.193		
	Total	80.251	108			
a. Dependent Variable: ORGCOVIDresponse						
b. Predictors: (Constant), ORGtrust						
c. Predictors: (Constant), ORGtrust, ORGsatisfaction						

Table 6: Regression Model Predicting Perceptions of Organizational Trust and Organizational Satisfaction on COVID-19 Response

Coefficients[a]						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.005	.132		.037	.971
	ORGtrust	.877	.058	.823	15.011	.000
2	(Constant)	-.180	.123		-1.461	.147
	ORGtrust	.602	.074	.565	8.172	.000
	ORGsatisfaction	.344	.065	.366	5.293	.000
a. Dependent Variable: ORGCOVIDresponse						

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The goal of the study was to identify predictors of satisfaction in organizational COVID-19 response between five variables using regression analysis. First, a linear regression model was utilized for all five variables to predict COVID-19 response. All 5 variable scales represented acceptable reliability scores. However, of these 5, only organizational satisfaction and organizational trust were significant. Those variables were analyzed using a black linear regression model and were found to be statistically significant, accounting for a large percentage (74.1%) of satisfaction with organizational COVID-19 response. Therefore, organizational trust and organizational satisfaction were primary predictors in organizational COVID-19 response. Organizational support, organizational culture, and organizational identification were not predictors of Greek-letter organization members' satisfaction with organizational COVID-19 response.

In considering why organizational trust and organizational satisfaction are predictors of satisfaction with an individual's Greek-letter organization response to COVID-19, it is important to consider Coomb's and Holiday's "Unpacking the Halo Effect: Reputation and Crisis Management" (2006). The halo effect was found to protect an organization and its reputation from certain threats. This is possible because individuals who are stakeholders in the organization are more likely to consider who is in control of the crisis and view the situation with a frame or perspective that may shape their opinion. Therefore, it is possible that because fraternity and sorority members place their organization in high regard and feel positively toward its leaders, they had more trust and satisfaction in the organization even in an unpredictable time. This effect leads them to maintain their positive perspective that their organization is reputable, thereby

moderating damage in the event of a crisis. Essentially, the organization is able to "rebound" faster than an organization that does not have a prior favorable reputation or established relationship with its members. For example, a fraternity or sorority chapter whose leadership is respected and viewed highly by chapter members is more likely to continue to be held in high regard and given the benefit of the doubt by chapter members even after a critical situation develops. Because of the reservoir of goodwill, or "halo effect," the chapter would likely continue to do well, and members would remain pleased with their Greek-letter organization and chapter leadership.

Another theory that could play into the outcome of this research is Freeman's stakeholder theory. According to this theory, a stakeholder is "any individual or group who can affect or is affected by the actions, decisions, policies, practices, or goals of the organization" or "those groups or individuals with whom the organization interacts or has interdependencies" (Gibson, 2000). The theory supports the idea that it is ethical to consider all individuals who have invested in the organization or are involved in the organization when making decisions or taking actions that may affect them. All things should be considered when recognizing what is in the organization or firm's best interest (Gibson, 2000). Stakeholder theory demonstrates the lasting impact a considerate relationship between organizations and those that are involved with it can have.

Although this approach was developed and used as a model for business ethics, it can be applied to other disciplines, including higher education. Individual members in Greek-letter organizations can be considered stakeholders. They are stakeholders not only in their respective chapters, but also in their respective councils and the campus community at large. These students are involved and active members of their

organizations, so if chapter officers are leading ethically, they are considering each member when guiding the chapter, evaluating options and decisions, and taking actions. Considering stakeholder theory, Greek-letter organizations could further relationships with their members and instill trust and satisfaction by facilitating opportunities for communication. Fraternity and sorority communities and chapters alike should focus on training to improve these variables so they will be better equipped to handle crises. Additionally, members should be able to communicate with leaders, and leaders should be able to communicate openly with members to increase feelings of trust and satisfaction. Because these feelings are predictive of satisfaction, they should be prioritized moving forward in the chapter, council, campus, and community levels.

Furthering the levels of satisfaction and trust in organizations is crucial due to the lack of regular operation and change in communication due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Should another crisis interrupt communication and influence chapter officers to redefine chapter communication, the members are statistically more likely to be satisfied with their chapter's response if they already built trust and satisfaction in their Greek-letter organization. If members feel that their opinions and interests are incorporated into their Greek-letter organization's efforts, the efforts are likely to be more successful partially because stakeholders, or chapter members, are included and satisfied.

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

Office *of*
Research Integrity

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

118 COLLEGE DRIVE #5125 • HATTIESBURG, MS | 601.266.6576 | USM.EDU/ORI

NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.
- Face-to-Face data collection may not commence without prior approval from the Vice President for Research's Office.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-21-63
PROJECT TITLE: Perceived support and connectedness in Fraternity and Sorority Life during the COVID-19 pandemic
SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of COMM, Interdisciplinary Studies
RESEARCHER(S): Julia Bishop, Kathryn Anthony

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved
CATEGORY: Expedited
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: March 15, 2021

Donald Sacco Jr.

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

ORI | Office of Research Integrity

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

STANDARD (ONLINE) INFORMED CONSENT

STANDARD (ONLINE) INFORMED CONSENT PROCEDURES
The Project Information and Research Description sections of this form should be completed by the Principal Investigator before submitting this form for IRB approval. Use what is given in the research description and consent sections below when constructing research instrument online. Last Edited May 13th, 2019

Today's date:02/21/2021		
PROJECT INFORMATION		
Project Title: Perceived support and connectedness in Fraternity and Sorority Life during the COVID-19 pandemic		
Principal Investigator: Julia Bishop	Phone: 6014086586	Email: julia.bishop@usm.edu
College: Arts and Sciences	School and Program: Interdisciplinary Studies	

RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

1. **Purpose**:

The purpose of the investigation is to assess the experience of Greek-letter organization members since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, evaluating perceieved support and connectedness. This study is being performed because of the way organization operations have been challenged as a result of the pandemic, influencing student experiences. Results may be used by Greek-letter organization chapters both at Southern Miss and other institutions to improve the memberships of students and understand their feelings since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. **Description of Study:**

This survey is available to the fraternity and sorority community at Southern Miss. It is intended for undergraduate students currently active in their chapters. The study will be available for roughly two weeks, or until there are an acceptable number of responses. There are about 1600 students in Greek-letter organizations at Southern Miss who make up the pool of possible participants. The survey will take about 10 minutes to complete.

3. **Benefits:**

The responses of the survey and outcome of the study will benefit fraternity and sorority communities by providing information about the experiences of students since the beginning of the pandemic. It will allow members to be better supported and understood during this time. Survey participants will have the opportunity to enter into a raffle for Amazon gift cards as incentive for completing the questionnaire. Participants will be able to provide feedback that directly influences the approaches made by Greek-letter organizations and their chapter officers. This will indirectly benefit the participants and their fellow chapter members.

4. **Risks:**

There are no known risks associated with this study.

5. **Confidentiality:**

The survey responses will be entirely anonymous. The data will be stored in a password protected computer in a faculty members office. The data file will be destroyed after 5 years.

6. **Alternative Procedures:**

7. **Participant's Assurance:**

This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5125, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001, 601-266-5997.

Any questions about this research project should be directed to the Principal Investigator using the contact information provided above.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

I understand that participation in this project is completely voluntary, and I may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. Unless described above, all personal information will be kept strictly confidential, including my name and other identifying information. All procedures to be followed and their purposes were explained to me. Information was given about all benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that might be expected. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided to me if that information may affect my willingness to continue participation in the project.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

By clicking the box below, I give my consent to participate in this research project.

☐ Check this box if you consent to this study, and then click "Continue." (Clicking "Continue" will not allow you to advance to the study, unless you have checked the box indicating your consent.)

If you do not wish to consent to this study, please close your browser window at this time.

APPENDIX C: SURVEY QUESTIONS

Classification: What is your classification? Please select one.

- Freshman
- Sophomore
- Junior
- Senior

Ethnicity: What is your ethnicity?

- White
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Other

Gender: What is your gender? Please select one.

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary/third gender
- Prefer not to say

Affiliation/membership year: How long have you been affiliated in a Greek letter organization? Please select one.

- First year
- Second year
- Third year
- Fourth year

Listed below are statements about the relationship between members and their Greek-letter organization. For each one, please indicate whether you strongly agree, agree, are neutral/unsure, mildly disagree, or strongly disagree based on your experience.

1. My Greek-letter organization tries to create a unique "family atmosphere"
2. My Greek-letter organization emphasizes strong loyalty and dedication
3. My Greek-letter organization emphasizes open communication
4. My Greek-letter organization treats each member as a total person
5. I feel that my Greek-letter organization has a real interest in the welfare and overall satisfaction of its members
6. Chapter leadership encourages people to speak up when they disagree with a decision
7. Chapter leadership gives me the freedom to express ideas
8. Chapter leadership is open to all questions
9. Other members and I frequently criticize chapter leadership as it relates to their efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic (R)
10. During the COVID-19 pandemic, chapter leadership has had a different idea about the organization than I have
11. My ideas regarding my chapter in the COVID-19 pandemic are ignored (R)
12. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, I haven't felt respected by my Greek-letter organization (R)

13. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, I have gotten good advice from chapter officers
14. I'd experience a sense of loss if I left my Greek-letter organization
15. If my Greek-letter organization failed, I'd feel like I failed
16. How I feel about myself is influenced by my Greek-letter organizations image
17. I feel defensive when others criticize my Greek-letter organization
18. I act upon messages from chapter leaders regarding the COVID-19 pandemic
19. I share my Greek-letter organizations values as they relate to the COVID-19 pandemic
20. I have a lot of pride in my Greek-letter organization's product/service since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic
21. Other members help me make sense of what's happening in my Greek-letter organization
22. Others in my Greek-letter organization are a lot like me
23. The organization values my contribution to its well-being
24. My Greek letter organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me (R)
25. My Greek letter organization would ignore any complaint from me (R)
26. My Greek letter organization disregards my best interest when it makes decisions that affect me (R)
27. Even if I did the best job possible, the Greek letter organization would fail to notice (R)
28. My Greek letter organization cares about my general satisfaction
29. My Greek letter organization shows very little concern for me (R)

30. My Greek letter organization takes pride in my accomplishments
31. My Greek letter organization tries to make my membership as interesting as possible
32. I am happy with my Greek letter organization and its efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic.
33. Both my Greek letter organization and its members benefit from the relationship during the COVID-19 pandemic.
34. Most students are happy in their interactions with my Greek letter organization since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.
35. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship my Greek letter organization has established with its members during the COVID-19 pandemic.
36. My Greek letter organization has failed to satisfy the needs of its members during the COVID-19 pandemic. (R)
37. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I feel members like me are important to my Greek letter organization.
38. In general, I believe that nothing of value has been accomplished between my Greek letter organization and its members since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. (R)
39. I'm willing to let my Greek-letter organization make decisions for me and other members.
40. The organization treats its members fairly and justly.
41. The organization can be relied on to keep its promises.
42. Sound principles seem to guide the behavior of my Greek-letter organization.

43. Whenever my Greek-letter organization makes a decision, I know it will be concerned about its members.
44. I believe my Greek-letter organization takes the opinions of its members into account when making decisions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.
45. My Greek-letter organization is interested in the well-being of its members, not just itself, during the COVID-19 pandemic.
46. My Greek-letter organization wants to understand how its decisions regarding the COVID-19 pandemic affect its chapter members.
47. My Greek-letter organization wants to be accountable to its members for its actions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
48. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, my Greek-letter organization wants its members to know what it is doing and why it is doing it.
49. Asks for feedback from members about the quality of its information during the COVID-19 pandemic.
50. Involves members to help identify the information we need during the COVID-19 pandemic.
51. Provides detailed information to members during the COVID-19 pandemic.
52. Asks the opinions of members before making decisions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
53. Takes the time with members to understand who we are and what we need in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.
54. In 2020, I felt as though my Greek-letter organization did a good job navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.

55. In 2021, I feel as though my Greek-letter organization is doing a good job navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.
56. In 2020, I felt as though my Greek-letter organization supported members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
57. In 2021, I feel as though my Greek-letter organization supports members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
58. At the national level, my Greek-level organization prioritized the wellbeing of its members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
59. At the chapter level, my Greek-level organization prioritized the wellbeing of its members throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

APPENDIX D: SURVEY RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Hello!

My name is Julia Bishop, and I am a senior at Southern Miss. I am hoping for your help in completing a quick survey about your experience in your Greek-letter organization. It should take no longer than 5-6 minutes.

The survey will investigate the experiences of members of Greek-letter organizations, as well as how they perceive their organization and its efforts to create connectedness during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study has been approved by USM IRB (protocol number 21-63). Responses to this survey will be anonymous and if you complete the survey, you can be entered to win one of 25 $50 gift cards!

If you are interested in sharing your feedback about your fraternity or sorority experience, click the link below to access the survey.

https://usmuw.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_aXi7jyh79Ct3A7c

If you have any questions, feel free to email me at julia.bishop@usm.edu. Thank you for your time!

Sincerely,

Julia Bishop

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